



HAMILTON COUNTY
HEROIN COALITION

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September 19, 2019

By Email

Hon. Mike Dewine
Governor, State of Ohio
Verne Riffe Center, Floor 30
77 South High Street,
Columbus Ohio, 43215

Dear Governor Dewine,

Thank you for your leadership on the complex issue of opioid addiction. In light of recent discussion regarding the possibility of a judgment or settlement in the lawsuit filed by Hamilton County, the City of Cincinnati, and thousands of other local jurisdictions across the nation against opioid manufacturers and distributors, the Hamilton County Heroin Coalition wishes to express our collective perspective on the governance of such funding, should it come to fruition. We are grateful for your recent comments in support of local governments' abilities to manage settlement funds.

The Hamilton County Heroin Coalition was formed in 2015 in response to the Opioid Epidemic in our region. Since then it has developed into a nationally recognized model for interagency communication, collaboration, and innovation. As significant as that recognition may be, the HCHC was not founded to win praise, but rather out of necessity. The institutions of local government, many of which make up the Heroin Coalition, have felt a tremendous strain because of the opioid crisis. Local Police Departments, the Hamilton County Sheriff, The Coroner, County Courts, The Justice Center, The Hamilton County Public Health District, The Mental Health and Recovery Services Board, and the Child Welfare System, just to name a few, have been inundated with rising demands in the wake of this opioid crisis.

The Heroin Coalition Partners responded to this demand by creating new collaborative programs designed to remove deadly drugs from our community, prevent secondary harms of intravenous drug use, get people into addiction treatment, and work on preventing drug use in future generations. These efforts have included:

- deployment of Quick Response Teams county wide;
- opening of the Talbert House Engagement Center;
- Expanding community treatment capacity and providing 70day/week access to treatment;
- Adopting community-wide protocols in Hospital Emergency Rooms
- Massive Scale distribution of the life-saving drug Naloxone;
- Harm Reduction vans providing critical medical care throughout the county;

- Assisting local neighborhoods in forming prevention coalitions and working with schools on prevention resources;
- Creation of the Heroin Task Force which investigates drug-related deaths to track down drug traffickers;
- Distributing a Tool Kit for faith leaders;
- Hosting educational forums for employers; and
- Development of a Pre-Arrest Diversion Program;

While these programs are providing a meaningful impact, and should save tax dollars in the long term, creating them required resources. Moreover, local government budgets have been strained by the increased caseloads for EMS, Police, Courts, the Jail, and Child Welfare.

In short, the Heroin Coalition came into being because local governments are on the front lines of the opioid crisis, and a rapid collaborative response was necessary.

For those same reasons, in a move supported by the Heroin Coalition, the City of Cincinnati and Hamilton County Commissioners joined hundreds of local governments across the nation in filing suit against the distributors of prescription opioid drugs whose negligence contributed to the widespread incidence of addiction in our community.

Those suits are still pending, but as news broke about large judgments and settlements in similar cases, the Ohio Attorney General and others took steps to attempt to intercept any potential settlement or judgment and deprive Hamilton County of local control over any settlement proceeds. The Heroin Coalition opposes this late attempt to divert money from the people who are suffering from this epidemic and to hoard it in the state capitol. The Heroin Coalition is heartened and grateful that you, Governor, have spoken out in support of local communities.

The best interventions in the opiate epidemic are known by local experts, providers, administrative entities, and most importantly everyday experts: persons and families directly impacted by addictive disease. Hamilton County has in place respected public entities with mandates to serve every citizen needing service. Abundant public input and oversight provide assurance that any conceivable service is effective, efficient and based on best practices. Oversight by other non-local public entities will certainly be wasteful by syphoning off administrative funds that add little if any value. One of the foundational principles of the HCHC is to avoid duplication of services. Local service planning and execution assure adherence to this value.

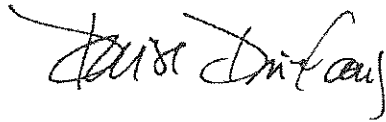
Over the last several months, the Heroin Coalition has had preliminary discussions about the governing principles that should govern the use of settlement funds locally. The prime directives of those principles are local control and collaboration. The funding must go toward the programs, many of which are listed above, which will help alleviate the strain of the opioid crisis on our regional systems. The funding should support the Heroin Coalition's four focus areas of supply reduction, treatment, harm reduction, and prevention.

Any plan for spending settlement funds should be guided by a collaborative body adhering to the following principles:

- Keeping diverse interests at the table;
- Coalescing around common goals;
- Promoting evidence-based practice;
- Sharing of knowledge;
- Evaluation teams;
- Standardization with room for variability based on community-specific needs; and
- **Local control**

Hamilton County has a head start on this effort because of the preexisting partnerships formed through the Heroin Coalition. Our Hospital Systems, Treatment Providers, Law Enforcement Agencies, First Responders, Local Governments, Nonprofit agencies, the Faith Community, and the Business Community already communicate and collaborate frequently. We are in a strong position to develop a cooperative approach to allocate any potential settlement funds to the areas where they will make the most impact and help those suffering in our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Denise Drieaus". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Denise" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Drieaus".

Commissioner Denise Drieaus
Chair, Hamilton County Heroin Coalition

cc: Heroin Coalition; Attorney General Dave Yost; Senator Lou Terhar; Senator Cecil Thomas; Senator Steve Wilson; Representative Catherine Ingram; Representative Sedrick Denson, Representative Brigid Kelly, Representative Jessica Miranda; Representative Bill Seitz; Representative Louis Blessing III; Representative Tom Brinkman; Commissioner Todd Portune; Commissioner Stephanie Summerow Dumas; Mayor John Cranley; Jeff Aluotto